

REMARKS

The Office Action mailed March 5, 2007, has been carefully considered by Applicant. Reconsideration is respectfully requested in view of the foregoing claim amendments and the remarks that follow.

Claim Objections

Claims 1 and 3 have been objected to because of several informalities. By the present Amendment, the claims are amended to place the same in conformance with U.S. claiming practice. As such, the claim objections are believed overcome.

Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1-6 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Peterman et al U.S. Patent No. 6,325,159.

Claims 1-6 are amended, as noted above.

Claims 7-10 are added.

Initially, Applicant notes that the purpose of Peterman et al was to maintain a selective pressure gradient in the well annulus, see column 5, lines 62-63, not to replace fluid in the riser, particularly at disengagement of the riser from the wellhead, as described in the present application.

According to Peterman et al '159, the annulus of the riser 52 is isolated from the fluid in the well annulus 66 by the use of diverters 106 and 108, see column 9, line 65, to column 10, line 1. The mud from the well annulus 66 is fed through mud pumps 102, see column 9, lines 58-60, and the mud pumps 102 are connected to the mud chamber of the pressure balanced tank 42, see column 14, lines 44-48.

The pressure balanced tank 42 has a cylindrical body 230 with a bore 231 running through it. The bore 231 is arranged to receive a drill string, e.g. drill string 60, a bottom hole assembly, or other drilling tools, see column 14, lines 30-34. The diameter of the bore 231 must therefore be of roughly the same diameter as the bore of the marine riser 52. An annular piston 236 engages and seals against the inner walls 238 and 240 of the body 230, see column 14, lines 36-38. The piston 236 reciprocates axially inside the

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annular chamber 235 when a pressure differential exists between the seawater chamber 242 and the mud chamber 244, see column 14, lines 49-51.

Annular piston 236 is not positioned inside a riser, per the claims of the present application. Rather, the annular piston 236 is positioned outside the riser and in a pressure balanced tank. In addition, the piston 236 is not connected to a drill pipe, per the claims of the present application, but rather is freely moveable in the annulus of the pressure balanced tank 42 and not responsive to pressure differentials.

In view of the comments above, it is clear that Peterman et al '159 is not directed to the objectives of the present application, and also fails altogether to teach or suggest the method steps and structure of claims 1-10 in the present application.

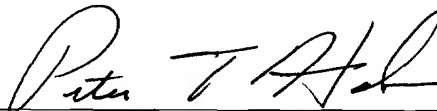
Peterman et al '159 therefore fails to anticipate the invention of claims 1-10.

Conclusion

The present Application is thus believed in condition for allowance. Such action is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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